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Behavioral and Emotional Effects of Anger Expression and Anger Management among Adolescents

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Abstract

Violence which is a form of physical aggression is on the rise among adolescents. Verbal and physical aggressions are associated with anger. Although anger is a common and natural emotion, problems associated with inappropriate expression of anger remain among the most serious concerns of parents, educators, and the mental health community. The aim of this descriptive study was to ascertain the behavioral and emotional effects of expression of anger and ways of managing anger among adolescents. Subjects for this study were 1162 (552 male and 610 female) adolescents age between 14 to 16 years old. They were randomly selected from all public schools in the state of Selangor in West Malaysia. The instrument used was developed based on the definition of anger and the eight dimensions suggested by Sisco (1991), Novaco (1994) and Spielberger (1988). Nearly everyone in the study said that they had experienced anger. When angry, 7.1% hit other people while 25.1 resort to hitting objects while 27.8% became aggressive verbally or cursing. More than 50% seemed to have regretted expressing their anger while 44.7% felt like asking for forgiveness. A majority or 64.5% of the subjects said that they resort to calming themselves when they felt angry.

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1. Introduction

The increasing trend in violence among adolescents had been of great concern. Violence is a form of physical aggression and it is usually an expression of anger (Hazaleus & Deffenbacher, 1986; Parrot & Zeichner, 2002). Aggression can be categorised into verbal and physical. Although anger is a common and natural emotion, or

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internal event, problems associated with inappropriate expression of anger remain among the most serious concerns of parents, educators, and the mental health community (Feindler & Engel, 2011). Anger leads to aggression (Campano dan Munakata, 2004; Neighbors, Vietor & Knee, 2002; Bushman & Anderson, 2002; Lok, Bond & Tse, 2009). When anger failed to be controlled it would lead to aggression (Hazaleus & Deffenbacher, 1986; dan Parrot & Zeichner, 2002). Anger and its expression represent a major public health problem for school-age and adolescents (Blake & Hamrin, 2007). Anger is associated with serious harm and in the worst case scenario, homicides may result. Further if an adolescent's anger occurs with aggression, a host of additional negative consequences may ensue (Fives, Kong & Fuller, 2011). Anger and aggression, which are generally considered as negative, are disruptive and detrimental emotional and behavioral expressions in social encounters (Lok, Bond & Tse, 2009).

Anger has been defined as a negative destructive emotion often related to sorrow, trouble, rage, and wrath (McCarthy, Barnes & Alport, 1998); as a subjective emotional state that involves the interrelationship of psychological components and cognitive appraisal (Novaco, 1975); and a negative feeling state associated with cognitive distortion, physiologic changes, and behavioral reactions (Kassinove & Sukholdosky, 1995).

Expression of anger may take many forms, including violence, self-harm, and more commonly, physical and verbal aggression (Blake & Hamrin, 2007). Anger facilitates the production of aggression (Averill, 1993). Thus anger causes a lot more harm than good, hence, it should be managed.

This research aimed to ascertain the behavioral and emotional effects of expression of anger and ways of managing anger among adolescents.

2. Materials and Method

Subjects for this study were 1162 (552 male and 610 female) adolescents age between 14 to 16 years old. They were randomly selected from all public schools in the state of Selangor in West Malaysia. The instrument used was developed based on the definition of anger and the eight dimensions suggested by Sisco (1991), Novaco (1994) and Spielberger (1988). The dimensions are: frequencies of anger, behavioral effects of anger, behavior of others that caused anger, places where anger frequently occurred, other feelings that accompanied anger, emotional effects of expression of anger and ways of managing anger. The total number of items in the anger questionnaire was 67. Respondents were asked to response a "Yes" or "No" answer to each item. The data was analysed using frequencies and percentages.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the frequencies and percentages of anger among adolescents. Only 10 or 0.9% said that they have never experience anger and 19.0% experience anger at least once a day.

Table 1: Frequencies & Percentages of Anger

Frequencies of Anger	No of Subjects (n=1162)					
	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Never	8	1.4	2	0.3	10	0.9
Sometime	180	32.6	136	22.3	316	27.2
A Few Times in A Month	47	8.5	54	8.9	101	8.7
A Few Times in A Week	131	23.7	167	27.4	298	25.6
At least Once a Day	90	16.3	131	21.5	221	19.0
A Few Times a Day	96	17.4	120	19.7	216	18.6

Table 2 presents the behavioral effects of anger. 33.2% preferred to stay away from the situation when they experienced anger. There were also some who resolved to act aggressively by hitting others, 7.1% and hitting objects 25.1% while some became aggressive verbally or cursing, 27.8%. Generally, boys tended to be more physical than the girls as reflected by the percentages and frequencies of those who hit others and objects.

Table 2: Behavioral Effects of Anger

Behavioral Effects of Anger	Number of Subjects (n =1162)					
	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hit Others	58	10.5	24	3.9	82	7.1
Hit Objects	163	29.5	129	21.1	292	25.1
Cursing	104	18.8	183	27.7	323	27.8
Crying	29	5.3	188	30.8	217	18.7
Tell Others That You are Angry	87	15.8	191	31.3	278	23.9
Stay Away From The Situation	193	35.0	193	31.6	386	33.2

As for who caused them to be angry, a majority or 71.3% subjects tend to say that their friends and next in line were their siblings 59.6%. This is not surprising because when the subjects were asked to identify places where anger took place most 70.7% said in school and 65.3% cited the home. Aggression has also increased in schools over the last decade (Burt, Patel, Butler & Gomezalez, 2013). The study by Thomas & Smith (2004) also found that the schools were the places where anger started. As for the emotion that brought about anger most of the subjects said 84.3% stress. As for the behavior of others that caused anger, a majority or 62.7% cited slander.

The emotional and behavioral effects of anger expression are presented in Table 3. More than 50% seemed to have regretted expressing their anger and 44.7% felt like asking for forgiveness while 29.9% felt terrible after. Generally more females than males regretted expressing their anger, felt like asking for forgiveness and felt terrible after expressing anger. In all the three cases the subjects of this study felt that they were wrong in expressing their anger and there was the element of regret in what they had done. However, 38% felt peaceful/calm after expressing their anger while 8.4% felt that others will fear them and 2.5% felt being respected. The last three groups may be the adolescents who believe that they were right in expressing their anger.

Table 3: Emotional and Behavioral Effects of Anger Expression

Emotional & Behavioral Effects of Anger Expression	Number of Subjects (n =1162)					
	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Feeling Guilty	297	53.8	369	60.5	666	57.3
Feel Like Asking for Forgiveness	228	41.3	291	47.7	519	44.7
Feeling Calm	184	33.3	258	42.3	442	38.0
Feeling Terrible	151	27.4	196	32.1	347	29.9
Feeling Hurt	80	14.5	155	25.4	235	20.2
Feel That I Am Losing My Friends	76	13.8	48	7.9	124	10.7
Feel That Others Will Fear Me	52	9.4	46	7.5	98	8.4
Feel Being Respected	20	3.6	9	1.5	29	2.5

Table 4 presents ways of managing anger by adolescents. Majority or 64.5% of the subjects said that they resort to calming themselves, 43.6% took a deep breath when they felt angry, while 41.4% reminded themselves about the negative effects of anger. There were a small group that is 9.1% who resort to assume that the person who made them angry was sick.

Table 4: Ways of Managing Anger

Ways Of Managing Anger	Number of Subjects (n =1162)					
	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Calm oneself	366	66.3	383	62.8	749	64.5
Take a Deep Breath	210	38.0	297	48.7	507	43.6
Remind Oneself About The Negative Effects Of Anger	236	42.8	245	40.2	481	41.4
Try to Understand	152	27.5	184	30.2	336	28.9
Confident Can Overcome Rationally	134	24.3	192	31.5	326	28.1
Unable to Control Anger	91	16.5	123	20.2	214	18.4
Call For A Discussion	85	15.4	128	21.0	213	18.3
Assume That The Other Person Was Sick	53	9.6	54	8.9	107	9.2

Anger is difficult to be managed by adolescents (Phillips-Hershey & Kanagy 1996). It is for that reason, it is common for schools to implement anger management groups as components of violence prevention programs (McCarthy, Van Horne, Calfa, Lambert, & Guzman, 2010).

4. Conclusion

Although anger is a common and natural emotion, it leads to aggression and so many other negative consequences such as homicide and violence. As such, anger should be managed. Parents, teachers and school counselors should work closely together to organize anger management programs to help manage anger among adolescents.

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